

Delaware Leads Nation in Graduation Rate Gains

Delaware made the greatest gains in high school graduation rates between 2013 and 2014, the U.S. Department of Education announced Monday.

The First State, which saw its rate increase from 80 percent in 2013 to 87 percent in 2014, led five states cited by the report as having made the greatest gains. Also cited were Alabama, Oregon, West Virginia and Illinois.

Delaware school and district leaders have credited the state's improvements in recent years to initiatives such as credit recovery programs, ninth grade academies and targeted interventions. Many of these efforts were initially funded through federal Race to the Top grants that went to the state as well as districts and charter schools. As a result of these investments, students receive additional supports before and during their first year of high school. In addition, schools are more likely to be able to identify students quickly if they are falling off track so they get the support they need before getting too far behind. Schools have targeted ninth graders because research shows that performance during that year is a major indicator in whether a student will ultimately graduate.

Supports have been coupled with improved data systems, which help educators better identify when and how students are falling off-track so they can more effectively target intervention. Teachers also have more time to communicate with their peers to identify and target needed supports thanks to their Professional Learning Communities, designated time during the school day when educators meet to plan and learn from each other about the most effective ways to serve their students.

“This recognition is the result of tireless work by educators and school leaders throughout the state working to meet the needs of every Delaware student,” Governor Jack Markell said. “Rising graduation rates, increased college attendance, and more students taking and passing college-level courses in high school all show that we are making great progress at a time when education is more important than ever. But we can and must continue to do better; we must sustain and improve upon the efforts that are producing these results.”

Acting Secretary of Education Steve Godowsky said he is proud of Delaware’s educators and students, whose hard work has led to these gains.

“We must continue to invest in these and other initiatives that are working to better prepare our students for college and career,” he said. “If confirmed by the Senate, I will work to continue everything from the effective implementation of our rigorous Common Core academic standards to support for our struggling schools to the Pathways to Prosperity initiative, which gives students hands-on learning opportunities in growing career fields to make learning relevant and fun.

“All of these efforts are necessary to ensure we are meeting student needs and keeping every student on a path to graduation and success after school,” Godowsky said.

The preliminary data released Monday by the U.S. Department of Education shows the majority of states – 36 – saw increases in overall graduation rates from 2013 to 2014. Six states saw decreases and eight had no change since 2013. The National Center for Education Statistics is expected to release final graduation rate data – including the nation’s newest graduation rate – in the coming months.

NOTE ABOUT THE DATA: The 2014 Delaware rate reported by the U.S. Department of Education (87 percent) differs from the rate the state reported earlier (84.4 percent), because

Delaware includes students in some special schools/programs that are excluded from the calculation used for the federal reporting. The state 2014 calculations also represented a significant increase from 2013, when the state reported a graduation rate of 79.9 percent.□

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